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ABSTRACT

This two-section paper treating Old French on the undergraduate level and suggesting changes in the French curriculum criticizes the traditional, chronological approach to program articulation. Cormier focuses on three ways to restructure the current program. He proposes to: (1) teach genre courses rather than chronologically oriented courses, (2) promote the "divided French major" concept while encouraging early specialization, and (3) develop a "concept" approach to literary studies. Niedzielski describes four possible courses in Old French from the viewpoint of objectives, organization, and texts. They are: (1) a 1-semester course in language, (2) a 1-semester course in language and literature, (3) a 2-semester course in language, and (4) a 2-semester course in language and literature. (RL)

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CURRICULUM PROBLEMS AND THE TEACHING OF OLD FRENCH TO UNDERGRADUATES

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I

Introduction

Historically speaking, the study of Old French language and literature was lost in the shuffle c. 1900, during the raging battle between the Classics and Modern Languages in the United States. We all know who won that battle, and the curriculum revision which it inspired has not been changed significantly since. The present-day French major curriculum has been handed down to us, by tradition, and most of us here today are unhappy with it, in one way or another. I am going to suggest some tentative ways to effect changes in the present situation, while Professor Niedzielski's portion deals more specifically with course offerings and methodology.

The background of the chronological approach to French literature in the French major should concern us at this juncture. George Watts, in his definitive The Teaching of French in the U.S.: A History, says that George Ticknor, appointed in 1816 Smith Professor of French and Spanish languages, "...began an ambitious course of lectures on French and Spanish literature, which was a body of consecutive and historical criticism, the first of that kind that Harvard had ever

FL 001 574

known. One of his important innovations was the study of contemporary writers in the Romance languages." (pp. 77-78)

Ticknor is probably responsible for the popularity of the chronological approach. Now, we do not condemn this method, nor are we necessarily against contemporary writers; but, we do protest an approach which misleads by not really offering the student the "panoramic" view of the history of literature which it purports to do. Yet this situation obtains in nearly every American college and university. As you must know, the years 1500-1960 are "covered" by individual "period" courses such as the Enlightenment, but, as Dr. Stone pointed out last year, French literature does not begin in 1500. Thus, the formative period, indeed the ultimate basis of French language and literature, is omitted from the curriculum of undergraduate French majors.

Some policy-makers protest that Old French should not be taught to undergraduates because they have not yet mastered the difficulties of Modern French. This goes somewhat against the grain of what we are told about the college Freshmen of 1966 and his impressive linguistic preparation; he speaks, understands, and reads Modern French so well that he takes advanced literature courses! Furthermore, this view assumes aprioristically that language is the main concern in the study of Old French, and as we have seen, and shall see again, the specialists in this area are at one in agreeing that both the language

and the literature of Medieval French should be taught. These same policy-makers need to be convinced that a study of the formative period of French literature would effect a better understanding of all subsequent French literature. Since there seems to be no question that literature is to be taught to undergraduates, what prevents us from offering, in fact requiring, a course on Old French language and literature?

It is well known that English departments across the country require Old English of their undergraduate majors; if they were able to find support and approval of this change, then we, too, can resurrect Old French studies from its second-class citizenship to its distinctly deserved role in the major program. We now have more medievalists specializing in French than ever before; we have more edited and translated texts than ever before. Nothing stops us, except perhaps what stopped medieval scholars in 1900 from fighting for their own existence-indifference, timidity, and even a little indolence.

The situation as it exists today in most universities, reviewed for you two years ago by Professor Atkinson, betrays the acute pedagogical problems associated with the teaching of Old French. The graduate courses are inadequate or are offered every other year in many places. Worse still, they are not required of undergraduates majoring in French. I have three basic notions I would like you to hear and to bring back to your chairmen, deans, and curriculum

committees, and all three involve an essential change in the French major, a change which will demand inclusion of Old French language and literature.

One possible way of "covering" the Middle Ages would be a curriculum revision of the "period" courses into a series of genre courses, e.g. Lyric Poetry, The Novel, The Theatre. This could push the content and syllabus back by three hundred years or so to c. 1150-1200 where each of these genres finds its origins. Let me anticipate your objections to this idea: genre studies offer only a temporary solution to the problem. There are, moreover, limitations in finding the qualified staff who, in the case of Lyric Poetry for example, should know not only Victor Hugo and Verlaine, but Bernart de Ventadour and Villon as well! Yet one medievalist in a department could handle this if allowed to trace in a survey-course, the various developments of the epic, lyric poetry, the novel, and the theatre. Students would read perhaps one or two representative works from each of these. The other specialists, in Renaissance, 18th or 19th centuries, etc., could then take over and continue with a similar stress on genres.

My second means of curriculum revision follows in the wake of leading educators' recent suggestions on the feasibility of a divided French major and on encouraging early specialization. Thus, one could major in Pedagogy and French (let us call it Plan A) or, in French Literature (Plan B). The schemes of Plan A would embrace such areas as Applied Linguistics, Phonetics, and Methodology, in addition to the

traditional survey courses. This would be preparatory to teaching French language (and perhaps some literature) at the Elementary-High School level, or even in Junior Colleges. Plan A could easily include a survey in Old French, using Bogaert et Passeron, Le Moyen Age, or perhaps a series of complete texts in Modern French translation, from the Roland to Villon.

Plan B would emphasize explication de textes, literary history, and genre studies, and could easily adopt a more than perfunctory introduction to Old French language. With such a divided major, (and it is to be hoped that there would be overlap between the two), duplication of courses could be avoided by offering only one French course in which those of Plan A and B read the same texts but those in A would read them and others in translation; those in B would read them in the original and would be responsible for a pre-determined knowledge of Old French syntax.

My third proposal is not very original, but may capture your attention because it has a somewhat Modern Ring. It is a "concept" approach to literary studies, and involves the cultural phenomena as well as the literary and linguistic. A series like the following would be offered to French majors: "La chrétienté à l'âge des ténèbres", "La Féodalité", "La Courtoisie", "L'Essor des Universités", "La Guerre de Cent Ans". Such an approach would need the cooperation of other departments, like History, Arts, and Music. But perhaps this is getting too far away from specialization and into the realm of "General Education."

As is evident from the above comments, this paper is more tentative than definitive. If Old French is not introduced into the undergraduate major, it is only the fault of the medievalists for not trying harder. Today I think the effort must be directed towards the policy-makers in your institution: the deans, chairmen, curriculum committees, and most of all the faculty itself. I would propose that a statement of purpose be drawn up and adopted by us all and issued to these agencies in order to point out the urgency of our interests. Now that the teaching of Modern French has undergone a major revision in the United States, it seems anachronistic to continue implementing the antiquated French major handed down from a prejudiced tradition. Changes in curricula are probably the most difficult to make in a university--courses once adopted, become deeply ingrained, and it is always easier to continue with what one has than to experiment with something new.

It is time we realized that <u>most</u> of the small, liberal arts schools in this country do not and will not offer Old French to undergraduates; unless we can change this situation, Conference 14 is doomed to failure. Therefore, I would encourage adopting and opting for the use of Modern French in the proposed course(s). This will sit well with Department Chairmen and Administrators and will give our arguments the leverage they need. Now that nearly all of us are convinced that in general, Medieval Studies, and in particular, Old French langauge and literature, should be brought to the undergraduate

French major, I think we need to take a more or less "official" stand, unite behind it, and begin to act.

Professor Niedzielski"s portion of this paper offers four specific courses in Old French to complement Dr. Stone's proposal of last year. Dr. Stone's program was aimed at advanced students in a general survey course. His presentation precluded, for the most part, what we hope to suggest here, namely, a perhaps more realistic, specific, and detailed view of the course requirements.

The four courses are as follows: 1) a one-semester Old French language course, 2) a one-semester Old French language and literature course, 3) a two-semester Old French language course, and, finally, 4) a two-semester course in Old French language and literature. His suggested programs would use traditional texts, but the linguistic introduction would differ in this way, (and obviates, by the way, the perennial initial problems of Latin and Vulgar Latin): Professor Niedzielski begins with Modern French and by analysis of phonetics and structure, brings the student back to Old French and eventually to Vulgar Latin. He further encourages the use of anthologies and/or bilingual texts for the beginning of the course, these to be supplanted by complete texts for the transition from language to literature, (approximately one semester for each). By appealling not only to historical but also to modern descriptive linguistics, Professor Niedzielski would emphasize pronunciation, hoping that

students will assimilate, thereby, a continuing interest and perhaps an attitude of awe and veneration for Medieval Studies, because they will be able to read a text aloud on their own and appreciate it from a poetic or literary point of view. I think his most dramatized striking contribution is his programmed instruction idea for bringing the student from a modernized French text back to its original in Old French. We certainly have come a long way from the Old French course of c. 1900 with the famous "Herr Doctor Tausendteufel and his bag of lethal instruments": "From the Introduction we picked up something about the origins of the texts and the scholarship that had produced the editions. My main exertions were absorbed in reading the texts through again and again to get my knowledge of them word perfect. This I regard as good. The rest, that is most, of my time was employed in hunting up etymologies for as many words as possible. This I regard as the most laborious and wasteful imposition I have ever endured. It completely destroyed my interest in the course and my respect for those responsible for it. Along with the thousands of other victims of the stupidity of specialists, I had neither the taste nor the gift for such drudgery." (From P. Mansell Jones, The Assault on French Literature, p. 15)

II

Suggested Course Offerings in Old French Language and Literature

A. One Semester Course in Old French Language

1. Objectives

1.1 To acquaint the student with a different culture and civilization which dominated most of Europe for centuries, and which inspired many of the economic and political institutions of the present day--from toll roads to democratic elections.

1.2 To describe the language used as the main means of communication among the members of this civilization--from the ninth or eleventh to the sixteenth centuries.

2. Organization

2.1 Lectures in English (preferably in French, if possible) on the political, economic, anthropological, and cultural history of the French territories from Vercingetorix to Henri IV.

2.1.1 The Gallic and Gallo-Roman eras; the Celtic substratum,

2.1.2 The Invasions (Franks, Normans); Feudalism; the German substratum.

2.1.3 Towards the achievement of political and cultural unity; religion and nationalism; the first and second renaissances.

2.1.4 Civil wars and decadence; deterioration of moral and social values.

2.1.5 Third renaissance; advent of modern civilization; Latin and Italian influences.

2.2 Practical aspects of reading Old French texts.

2.2.1 Teach the pronunciation of the authors of the main literary works in French dialects from the eleventh to the sixteenth centuries, so that the rich sounds and rhythms of Old French poetry will eventually become a raality for the student.

2.2.2 Using recent developments in synchronic linguistics, teach the essentials only of structural contrasts between Modern French, (which the students already know, instead of Latin, which they know less and less), and the French of the texts chosen below.

3. Texts

3.1 For 2.1 above, any parts of a book like A. Ewert, The French Language, or, E. Bourciez, Eléments de linguistique romane, or better, Von Wartburg, Evolution et structure de la langue française.

3.2 For 2.2.1 above, a series of small pamphlets to be prepared on the model of Kökeritz and Helge, A Guide to Chaucer's Pronunciation. (Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1962).

3.3 For 2.2.2 above, J. Bogaert et J. Passeron, Moyen Age, Coll. "Les Lettres françaises," (Magnard, 1954).

B. One-Semester Course in Old French Language and Literature

1. Objectives

1.1 Culture and civilization; (see A.1.1)

1.2 History of the language: to trace the history of the languages and dialects used in Old French literature from the ninth to the sixteenth centuries.

1.3 Literary history: to survey the developments and evolution of Old French literature, insisting on genres rather than chronology *per se*.

2. Organization

2.1 See 2.1 and 2.2 in A.

2.2 Practical work: readings in either a bilingual anthology or in complete works edited in Modern French (cf. the series in preparation by Appleton-Century-Crofts and Prentice-Hall.) For many reasons, some of which are given in the introduction, it is advisable to use complete texts in translation for any course in which the student has not had sufficient linguistic preparation.

2.3 Literary problems, aesthetics, philosophy, and the like, would be discussed and emphasized rather than just history of Old French literature and accumulation of names and facts.

3. Texts; Exams

3.1 Same as in one-semester language course.

3.2 Final exam: on either 1) culture-civilization, history of the language, literature, or 2) "explication de textes" with a view to integrating the three main components of the course.

3.3 Term Paper: study of a general problem in literary history, e.g. "Influence de la religion dans le développement des genres littéraires au moyen-âge"; "realism and Idealism in Thirteenth Century Literature"; "The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century"; etc.

C. Two-Semester Course in Old French Language

1. Objectives

1.1 1700 years of culture: to acquaint the student with the historical development of the French nation and its civilization, emphasizing its cultural heritage rather than political history--from the pre-Roman period to the apogee of the sixteenth century Renaissance, from the Roman soldiers and merchants to the Classical honnête homme, from the Gallic hunters and fisherman to Rabelais and the Libertins.

1.2 2200 years of language: to trace the essential history of the French language from the oldest Latin inscriptions to the modern idiom.

1.3 600 years of French literature: to teach the language of the most important samples of Old and Middle French literature.

2. Organization

2.1 Culture and Civilization: same as A,2, and include a short summary of the birth, expansion, and dismemberment of Romania and the Latin language.

2.2 Historical linguistics: lectures on historical linguistics, methods of language analysis, and language reconstruction.

2.2.1 Introduction to comparative linguistics (cf. Robert Hall's article in Language...)

2.2.2 Spoken vs. written language: samples from Latin and Modern French with reference to socio-linguistics and phonostylistics.

2.2.3 Regularity and continuity of linguistic change and universality of linguistc evolution; comparison with other languages, especially English and American English; drifts; yod; stress.

2.3 Basic language skills in Old French: practical work in reading Old French texts, using various audio-lingual and audio-visual aids already available.

2.3.1 Phonological descriptions for listening and speaking.

2.3.2 Reading for meaning: contrastive structural analysis of Modern French and various Old French texts, using a double historical and geographical progression from Middle French to the Serments de Strasbourg, from Francien to the French and Provencal dialects differing most from Francien. For this analysis one could use either a bilingual anthology (i.e. in Old and Modern French, e.g. Bogaert et Passeron, of supra), or a Programmed Reader offering a selection of historical, philosophical, and theatrical texts in prose and verse, presented first in Modern French, then in one or two steps of adapted Old French, finally in Old French (and eventually Vulgar Latin), with glosses for difficult lexical items. (See Excursus below)

2,3,3 Writing: The students could prepare, at first in common, in workshop-like sessions, under the supervision of the instructor, short adapted texts, and later individually as homework; finally they would select for a term paper a short, complete work or a passage from a longer work which they would be required to rewrite in two or three programmed versions. The student would thus get much practice in reading and writing Old French; this would also prepare for and ease the task of future students.

3. Texts and Materials: Same as A,3, but in more detail.

3.1 Audio-visual aids (cf. November, 1966 issue of French Review.)

3.2 Any anthology or complete work presenting bilingual or Modern French versions--for the writing exercises and term paper.

4. Excursus: a sampling of the Programmed Reader. We take the Modern French version from Bogaert et Passeron, a short passage from (La Chanson de Roland; we will use longer and longer passages as the student progresses.) The student begins by reading a) a modernized version, then goes on to b) an adapted text, e.g.

> Bel sire, cher copain, pur Deu, que vos en semble
> Tanz de bons vassals voyez gésir par tere!
> Pleindre pouvans France douce, la bele.
> Comme à cette heure elle reste déserte de tels barons.

a) second stage of adaptation, or original version, according to linguistic difficulties, e.g.

> Bel sire, chers compaing, pur Deu, que vos en haitet
> Tanz bons vassals veez gésir par tere!
> Pleindre poums France dulce, la bele.
> De tels barons cum or remeint déserte.

4.1 For writing the texts, the different versions would appear juxtaposed one under the other, e.g.

frame 1) Beau sire, cher compagnon, par Dieu, que vous en semble
frame 2) to be filled in by the student
frame 3) Bel sire, chers cumpaing, pur Deu, que vos en haitet

The confirmation (answer) is given for immediate reinforcement and better learning; any difficult or unpredictable lexical items could be provided in frame 2 for the student.

D. Two-Semester Course in Old French Language and Literature

1. Objectives

1.1 See C, 1.1

1.2 See c, 1.2

1.3 600 years of literature: to study the genesis, elaboration, and development of different literary genres during the Middle Ages in France, to show how literature reflects social life and represents the culture and the civilization of the people who read it.

2. Organization

2.1 See C, 2.1

2.2 Historical linguistics; history of the French language; (cf. D. Campbell's paper, offered to this Conference two years ago, p. 9, a short, one-semester course on the History of the Language.)

2.3 Reading Old French literature

2.3.1 Lectures a) problems particular to Medieval and Medieval French literature, e.g. search for manuscripts, the preparation of an edition, and on 6) the origins of genres, c) international movements, d) literary trends (e.g. courtoisie).

2.3.2 Practical work: teach the pronunciation of the main authors or literary works, cf. one-semester course. Also, read a selection of texts (complete rather than excerpts), representing each genre studied. One could start with later, easier texts, e.g. Villon rather than Conon de Bethune, and eventually reaching the earlier texts. It is to be hoped that the sense of historical evolution would be preserved by the lectures.

3. Texts and exams

3.1 Same texts as for C

3.2 For readings, any complete edition of Old French texts, not excluding Societe des anciens textes francais, Textes litteraires fraincais (Droz), and Classiques francais du moyen age.

3.3 Final exams. First semester: on culture-civilization, history of the language, or phonology. Second semester: literary subject or some aspect of paleography (e.g. deciphering an Old French text.)

3.4 Term papers. First semester: a linguistic problem; Second, a literary problem.